



MACHIAVELLI AND HIS IDEA OF MORALITY IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS- INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PRINCE AND DISCOURSES

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ABSTRACT

Writing on Machiavelli is not an easy task and writing on the idea of morality in *The Prince* and *Discourses* is even more difficult. Writing on someone whose name is equivalent to murder, treachery, cunningness, slyness, immoral, and evil becomes a tough task. How can we find an idea of morality in the writing of someone who is considered a the teacher of evil (Strauss 1957, 1978), advisor to commit murder (Tarleton 2002), *The Prince* a handbook for gangsters (Russell), advocate of imperialism (Hornqvist 2004) and many more horrific adjectives related with his name?

This paper will try to answer the following questions in Machiavelli's writings What is morality? What is the basis on which an act is considered moral and immoral and how does he define an act as moral or immoral? What are the key interpretations of Machiavelli's texts?

KEY WORDS: Machiavelli, Morality, International Politics, State, Human Nature.

What is Morality?

The definition of morality is equal to answering the question of what is considered to be good or what is held to be good by the people (Mansfield 1984: 179). And on this basis, it can be generally interpreted that what one society held as good, need not to be held good by another society. So it demands specification and context. Ethics is about principle, but it is more than principle. It is about interpretation of these principles as well as the choices and action. This shows the importance of judgment in interpreting principles and in choosing an action on the basis of these principles (Nardin 1992). Morality is context dependent and differs from time to time (Skinner 1981). So from this definition we can conclude that morality is not about what is good, but what is considered to be good by the people and it is context dependent. During Machiavelli's time meaning of morality was related to living and acting in accordance with the Christian values of charity, mercy, and sacrifice, love of god and forgiveness of enemies (Skinner 1981, Mansfield 1984:179, Berlin 1997:45). In the words of Harvey C. Mansfield:

Morality had meant not only doing the right action, but also but doing it for the right reason or for the love of God. Thus, to be good was thought to require 'a profession of good' in which the motive for doing good was explained; otherwise, morality would go no deeper than outward conformity to law, or even to superior force, and could not be distinguished from it.....because it is difficult to live a moral life by oneself; hence morality requires the construction of an imagined republic or principalities but when Machiavelli denies that imagined republic or principalities 'exist in truth' and declares that the truth in these or all matters is the effectual truth, he says that no moral rule exists, not made by men, which men abide by. (Mansfield 1984:179)

The debate about right action includes another debate which is, right action for the sake of right action or for the right outcome. There are many points of view in this debate. This includes two major categories. The first debate is among the deontologists and consequentialist. It is not possible to have a watertight separation of these two categories, but this is done to make it simple to understand. Machiavelli is considered as classical consequentialist (Grant 1999), Ethical Consequentialist (Mansfield 1984) and Deontologist (Benner 2009). But still he is considered as consequentialist by a large majority of scholars. In his own words,

In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court of appeal, one judges by the result. So let a prince set about the task of conquering and maintaining his state; his methods will always be judged honorable and will be universally praised. (*The Prince* 1532, 1950:64)

This debate of consequentialism goes further and includes the consequences for whom. One side of interpreters of *The Prince* and *Discourses* claims that it is basically a guide for the rulers to control the city for their personal gains (Strauss 1957) and a justification for murder by the rulers (Mansfield 1998: VII, Grote 1998:119). The other side of scholars, who consider him the great patriot on the basis of his chapter 16 of *The Prince* and chapter x of book I, denies these charges and argues for his republican spirit in the *Discourses*. They see consequentialism in the terms of state and not for the purpose of any individual. We can find this in

chapter 26 of *The Prince* where he is more concerned about the good of the people than good of The Princes.

Even chapter seventeen, which gave him the most sinister reputation for choosing fear over love, have the seeds of peace, order and stability of the state (which means people) than for fewer people:

Coming now to the other qualities mentioned above, I say that every prince ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are won't to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only. (*The Prince* 1532, 1950: 64)

Introduction of the first book of the *Discourses* also talks about the common benefit of the purpose of the book when he writes,

Yet animated by that desire which impels me to do what may prove for the common benefit of all, I have resolved to open a new route, which has not yet been followed by anyone (Discourses 1950:103).

In chapter V of First Book of the *Discourses* he is in complete support of republicanism and liberty and freedom of the people,

And because in every Republic there exists the Nobles and the Populace, it may be a matter of doubt in whose hands the guard is better placed..... There are strong reasons in the favour of each but, to judge by the results, we must incline in favor of the nobles, for the liberties of Sparta and Venice endured a longer space of time than those of Rome.. (*Discourses* 1950: 122).

Having said all the essential aspects on the definition of the morality, now we will move towards the basis on which he is considered an immoral philosopher and teacher of evil, and why those statements were considered the sayings of the devil and brought him the most sinister reputation. Chapter three, five, seven, fifteen, and eighteen of *The Prince* brought him the most sinister reputation. In these chapters he talks about employing all means for success in domestic politics and means to maintain and win new territories. In these chapters, he is not concerned about morality in the society; he is interested in survival and glory of the state. He is asking to employ all means whenever necessary because he thinks humans cannot be trusted.

Some of the most important interpretation of *The Prince* and *Discourses* and idea of morality-

There are many important and controversial interpretations of *The Prince* and *Discourses*. In the views of Meinecke (1962), Machiavelli's doctrine was a sword thrust in the body politic of the Western humanity, which caused it to cry out and to struggle against itself (Meinecke 1962: 49)1. For Garret Mattingly (1958, 482-491) it is a satire and it cannot be taken literally. In the view of Luigi Ricci (1903) *The Prince* was a cautionary tale and he was a patriot, Democrat and supporter of liberty. *The Prince* was written to tell the effects of tyranny (Berlin

1980: 27). In the views of Hiram Haydn (1950) it was an anti-Christian book and an attack on the authority and influence of the church. In their view, it was also an attempt in defense of the pagan view of morality (Cited in Berlin Isaih (1980: 39))

Swiss scholars Walder, Kaegi and von Muralt consider him as the peace-loving humanist who believed in stability, order and pleasure of life (Berlin 1980: 29). Macaulay and Herder consider *The Prince* as the book which depicts the picture of that time. Francis Bacon (1857:17, 76) considers him as the supreme realist who does not believe in fantasies. Antonio Gramsci (1949) considers him as a revolutionary who spoke against feudal aristocracy, papacy and their mercenaries. For the Jesuits, he is the devil's partner in the crime and *The Prince* is a handbook for the gangsters (Bertrand Russell). Bodin, Frederick and Leo Strauss are some of the big names who are in the list of anti-Machiavels (Berlin 1980:36). Berlin (1980) considers him as the moralist. But for Berlin he is a pagan moralist and not a Christian moralist. He writes,

One is the morality of the pagan world: its values are courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline, happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one's proper claims and the knowledge and power needed to secure their satisfaction (Berlin 1980: 45)

In Berlin's view, for Machiavelli Christianity is an obstacle in building a society which he wants to build. B. P. Burnett (2002) strongly opposes the immoral or amoral interpretation of *The Prince* and *Discourses*, and considers him as a rule consequentialist. For Erica Benner (2009), Machiavelli's fundamental concerns are ethical. His conception of morality was based on the nature of human desires and ethical demands which human beings place on them. Words like order, necessity, fortuna, justice, virtue and law symbolizes his connection with his idea of morality. In Benner's view, Machiavelli and his writings relates to a long critical traditions of Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon and Plutarch (Benner 2009:170). His conception of the good is very clear in personal relation in a society when he gives priority to friendship and justice over the success of an individual in personal life and it makes him a moral philosopher who is non-consequentialists (Benner 2009:340 cited in Burnett 2012). His preference to act of humanity can be traced in the XX chapter of the IIIrd book the *Discourses*:

This example shows that an act of humanity and benevolence will at all times have more influence over the minds of men than violence and ferocity. It also proves that provinces and cities which no armies and no engines of war, nor any other efforts of human power, could conquer, have yielded to an act of humanity, benevolence, chastity, or generosity. (*Discourses* 1950:472) 16

In the interpretation of J. H. Whitefield (1965), for Machiavelli, acts cannot be justified until and unless those acts help the common public in general. If the act is done for personal benefit, then it needs to be condemned (Whitefield 1965:92). Harvey Mansfield (1996) does not agree with Whitefield and defines morality in the writings of Machiavelli in reference to Virtue. For Machiavelli, Writes Mansfield,—

Deeds are sovereign: when confronted by a necessity, Machiavelli advises, do not worry about justice, but actions and words to justify your action will come to you afterward (Mansfield 1996:3, cited in Burnett 2012).

Ruth Grant (1997) interprets Machiavelli not as someone who was moral or immoral, but someone who knows that to live in the world peacefully you have to master the art of deception and hypocrisy. So it is not about being moral all the time, but appears to be moral all the time. He is a pragmatic moralist and acting according to necessity makes an act praiseworthy. Grant writes,—Machiavelli recommends the use of 'true' hypocrisy, which requires cultivating the appearance of moral goodness, virtue, or religiosity while actually seeking to further one's own ends, or even for the sake of furthering one's own ends (Grant 1997: 19). In both the books he recommends deception as a strategy for the success and security of the state.

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